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DAWN

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PIA privatisation challenged in Lahore High Court

Petitioner says Dec 23 move is in violation of law governing the airline

LAHORE: A constitutional petition has been filed in the Lahore High Court (LHC) challenging the recent privatisation of Pakistan International Airlines (PIA).

Filed by Advocate Nabeel Javed Kahloon, the petition seeks to set aside the sale of the national carrier, describing it as illegal and unconstitutional.

The Cabinet Committee on Privatisation (CCoP) had endorsed a Rs135bn bid from an Arif Habib Group-led consortium for a 75 per cent stake in the airline.

The winning bid was approximately 35 per cent higher than the government's reference price of Rs115bn. The consortium has pledged to invest an additional Rs80bn to Rs125bn into the airline for fleet modernisation and operational restructuring.

The petitioner argues that the privatisation process, specifically the Expression of Interest (EOI) published on May 7, 2025 and the subsequent sale on Dec 23 violates the Pakistan International Airlines Corporation (Conversion) Act, 2016.

He states that the federal government, while issuing the EOI, did not appreciate the legal fact, that PIA is a trans-provincial institution included in the Federal Legislative List, Part II, hence without the approval of the Council of Common Interests (CCI) as mandated under Article 154 of the Constitution, since no privatisation could take place.

He argues that the government, through its cabinet committee, passed an order illegally for the privatisation of PIA without the approval of CCI and Parliament.

He contends that any restructuring or transfer of assets should remain within government-controlled entities as per the sections 3 and 4 of the 2016 Act.

The petitioner claims that massive public funds have been injected into the airline over decades and its sale to a private group is a matter of significant public interest.

He contends that the respondents, to justify privatisation, falsely portrayed PIA as a burden on the public exchequer and wrongly stated that its value is five times less than its accumulated losses (approximately Rs800bn).

In fact, he claims, PIA has not been receiving grants or subsidies from the government as its financial difficulties are due to debt servicing, mismanagement and policy failures.

He argues that the process for the sale of the asset adopted by the respondents amounts to misuse of authority, lack of transparency and arbitrary.

The lawyer argues that an amendment made to Section 28 of the Privatisation Commission Ordinance on Dec 14 2023, to oust jurisdiction of high courts, does not apply to the case in hand, since the petition challenges constitutional and legal violations, not private disputes between bidders.

He asserts that the sale of a national asset like PIA falls under judicial scrutiny under Article 199 of the Constitution.

Advocate Kahloon, who is known for representing aviation industry's employees before courts, alleges that he has been subjected to harassment for raising the issue of the PIA's privatisation.

The lawyer asks the court to declare the sale null and void, specifically the agreement reached on Dec 23, 2025.

He also urges the court to suspend all further steps, halt any actions arising from the May 2025 EOI and order that any necessary restructuring be kept strictly within state-owned entities.

Modi's silence on violence against Indian minorities rebuked

• Sherry Rehman questions his failure to condemn attacks on Christians and Muslims • WSJ report highlights rising religious intolerance and systemic discrimination in India

By Iftikhar A. Khan

ISLAMABAD: PPP parliamentary leader in the Senate, Sherry Rehman, has expressed grave concern over the continued silence of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi regarding violence carried out by Hindu radical groups against religious minorities, particularly Christians and Muslims.

“What stops Prime Minister Modi from condemning the actions of Hindu radicals who attack Christians — as we all do in Pakistan — from clearly stating that such violence is unacceptable in a civilised country?” Senator Rehman asked. “I think we know the answer, he is comfortable with impunity.”

Senator Rehman underscored that leadership was ultimately tested by its willingness to confront extremism within its own support base.

Silence, she warned, risked signalling tolerance for impunity and normalising hate-driven violence.

Her remarks align with recent reporting by *The Wall Street Journal*, which has documented a significant rise in violence against religious minorities in India since Prime Minister Modi took office in 2014.

‘Religious intolerance’

According to the report, groups aligned with the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) have been implicated in attacks against Muslims and Christians, alongside systemic discrimination in employment, education, housing, and access to civic participation.

The *Journal* noted that India's Muslim community — approximately 14 per cent of the population — has borne the brunt of the most severe attacks, facing widespread social exclusion and ghettoisation.

Christians, who make up just 2.3pc of the population and largely belong to economically marginalised communities, have also increasingly been targeted.

The *Journal* reported that radical Hindu groups remained fixated on what they describe as the “threat” of Christian conversion, despite the community's small size and with 80pc of India's population being Hindu.

At least 12 Indian states have enacted laws prohibiting religious conversion by “force, fraud, or allurement”, with the term “allurement” often interpreted so broadly that even peaceful evangelical activity is criminalised. The report added that violence against Christians was frequently justified under the pretext of enforcing these laws.

Senator Rehman emphasised that protecting religious freedom and minority rights was neither a regional nor a partisan issue, but a universal democratic obligation.

“Condemning extremism should never be selective,” she stated. “A civilised nation is defined not by the power of its majority, but by how it protects its most vulnerable citizens.”

She asserted that a democratic country must unequivocally denounce hate-based violence, uphold constitutional protections for all faiths, and ensure accountability for those who incite or carry out attacks in the name of religion.

Year's first supermoon lights up sky

By Kalbe Ali

ISLAMABAD: The first supermoon of 2026 was observed across Pakistan on Saturday, as a larger and brighter than usual moon illuminated the night sky.

Traditionally referred to as the ‘Wolf Moon’, the supermoon started to rise in Pakistan at 5:51pm, with lunar illumination reaching 99.8 per cent, a Suparco spokesperson said in a statement. The astronomical event also marked the last supermoon in a series that began in October 2025, it added.

According to the space agency, the next series of supermoons is expected to begin in November 2026, offering further opportunities for astronomical observation later in the year.

On Saturday, the 14th of the lunar month Rajab, the moon was visible in the evening across the country.

Unlike Friday, when there was a bright halo around the moon due to refraction, the supermoon appeared larger than usual and was clearly visible in the sky.

At the time of the event, the distance between the Earth and the moon was approximately 362,000 kilometres, making the moon appear 6 to 7 per cent larger and about 10 per cent brighter than an average full moon. Suparco stated that the Quadrantids meteor shower would also be at its peak during this period.



THIS year's first supermoon lights up the night sky in Karachi on Saturday.—PPI

Two soldiers, civilian martyred in GB avalanche

By Our Correspondent

GILGIT: Two Pakistan Army personnel and a civilian machine operator were martyred in an avalanche in Gilgit-Baltistan's Burzil Pass, the military's media wing said on Saturday.

The Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said in a statement that a snow-clearing operation, led by Captain Asmad Gulfam, took place on the night of Friday and continued into Saturday morning, to facilitate troops moving in the area.

“At around 2am on Jan 3, 2026, while the subject operation was ongoing, a snow slide triggered, resultantly Captain Asmad [28, a resident of Lahore], along with two soldiers and a civilian machine operator, got entrapped,” the ISPR said.

The statement added that four individuals were rescued from the snow; however, the condition of Captain Asmad, Sepoy Rizwan (32, a resident of Attock) and machine operator Essa (a resident of Astore) deteriorated and the three embraced martyrdom.

“These individuals rendered the ultimate sacrifice by leading a challenging operation, in extreme weather conditions, to facilitate operational movement of forces,” the ISPR said.

“Their sacrifice and devotion to duty are a testimony to the fact that all ranks of the Pakistan armed forces are determined to defend the motherland and will not hesitate to lay down their lives in the line of duty and devotion to the cause,” it added.

Last month, two army personnel were seriously injured when a speeding oil tanker hit an army vehicle near Qazi Ahmed town along the National Highway in Nawabshah on Saturday.

The victims, identified as Mohammed Bakhsh and Mohammed Nadeem, were on their way to Sukkur from Karachi when their vehicle met with the accident.

Police and Rescue-1122 personnel reached the accident site and moved the victims to the Qazi Ahmed Taluka Hospital for emergency treatment. Later, one of them was referred to the People's Medical University Hospital in Nawabshah due to his critical condition.

CJP stresses swift resolution of tax disputes

ISLAMABAD: Chief Justice of Pakistan Yahya Afridi chaired a high-level meeting to consider strategic reforms aimed at expeditious disposal of high-impact tax litigation, amid concerns that prolonged disputes are constraining fiscal space and undermining economic stability.

According to an official statement, the meeting was attended by Supreme Court's Justice Miangul Hassan Aurangzeb, Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) chairman, member FBR (Legal), and other senior officials.

Participants held detailed deliberations on developing a sustained institutional framework to address long-pending and high-value tax cases, with a focus on reducing litigation backlogs, enhancing legal certainty, and protecting public revenue.

The CJP observed that prolonged tax litigation adversely affects investor confidence and weakens economic predictability, stressing that the timely adjudication of such matters is critical for national economic health. He reiterated the judiciary's commitment to supporting reform initiatives that promote efficiency, predictability, and swift justice in cases with direct economic consequences.

The meeting discussed several reform-oriented measures, including the prioritisation and fast-tracking of high-stakes tax disputes, improved coordination between tax authorities and the judiciary, strengthening legal preparedness and case management, and exploring procedural and institutional mechanisms to ensure consistency and speed in adjudication. The initiative forms part of the broader justice sector reform agenda aimed at improving governance, reducing systemic delays, and aligning judicial processes with Pakistan's economic and development priorities.—Malik Asad

PAF successfully tests air-launched cruise missile

Taimoor capable of engaging enemy land and sea targets with high precision

Dawn Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Air Force (PAF) has successfully conducted the flight test of the indigenously developed “Taimoor” weapon system, the military's media affairs wing said on Saturday.

In a statement, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said the development marked

another significant milestone in the advancement of national aerospace and defence capabilities. “Taimoor air-launched cruise missile is capable of engaging enemy land and sea targets with high precision at a range of 600 kilometres, carrying a conventional warhead,” it added.

“Equipped with state-of-the-art navigation and guidance system, Taimoor is designed to fly at very low altitudes, enabling it to effectively evade hostile air and missile defence systems. Its precision-strike capability significantly enhances the conventional deterrence and operational flexibility of PAF, further strengthening the country's overall defence posture,” it said.



A PAF fighter jet equipped with a Taimoor air-launched cruise missile.—X/@DGPR_PAF

“The successful flight test underscores the technical maturity, innovation and self-reliance achieved by Pakistan's defence industry. The launch was witnessed by senior officers of the armed forces, along with distinguished scientists and engineers who played a pivotal role in the development of this advanced weapon system,” the ISPR said.

PAF chief Air Marshal Zaheer Ahmed Baber Sidhu extended congratulations to the scientists, engineers and PAF team on the achievement, the statement said. “He lauded their professional excellence, dedication and unwavering commitment to strengthening Pakistan's defence capabilities,” it added.

The air chief also reaffirmed that such accomplishments “are a testament to the nation's resolve to achieve technological self-sufficiency and maintain a credible conventional deterrent in the evolving regional security environment.

The successful test of the Taimoor weapon system reflects PAF's continued pursuit of operational readiness, technological superiority and national security objectives,” he was quoted as saying.

President, PM pay tribute to PAF

President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif paid tribute to PAF for the successful test of Taimoor air-

launched cruise missile.

“The preparation of modern weapons at the local level is a clear reflection of national capability, resolve, and institutional expertise,” the president said in a statement.

The president said that the success of the test has “further strengthened national defence and bolstered Pakistan's responsible defence policy for ensuring stability in the region”.

He lauded the “hard work, dedication, and spirit of national service of scientists, engineers, and the officers and personnel of PAF”.

PM Shehbaz also congratulated PAF for the successful test, stating that the weapon system will “further enhance the country's defence”.

He acknowledged the recognition of the professionalism, dedication, and unwavering commitment of the PAF to strengthen the country's defense capabilities.

“The country's defence will be further strengthened thanks to the Taimoor weapon system. The successful flight test demonstrates the technological maturity, innovation, and self-reliance of Pakistan's defence industry and reflects PAF's operational readiness, technological superiority, and continuous efforts to achieve national security objectives,” the prime minister said in a statement.

Protests erupt in GB over caretaker cabinet appointments

• Parties, civil society reject interim set-up over lack of representation; question fairness of upcoming polls • Demonstrators block River Road; eight arrested

By Jamil Nagri

GILGIT: A protest organised by the GB Youth Movement was held outside the Gilgit-Baltistan Chief Minister Secretariat in Chinarbagh on Saturday against the appointment of alleged controversial personalities in the GB caretaker government.

Political and civil society members also announced protests in Ghanche, Nagar and Shigar districts over the lack of representation in the caretaker cabinet.

Protesters alleged that several controversial individuals, who had been part of previous governments and were affiliated with political parties, had been appointed to the GB caretaker cabinet. They said the inclusion of such figures in the caretaker cabinet was part of an attempt at poll rigging in the

upcoming GB general elections and was unacceptable. The protesters demanded representation of educated youth and neutral individuals in the caretaker cabinet.

They announced a sit-in protest until the decision to appoint the cabinet members was revoked. During the protest, demonstrators blocked River Road in the Chinarbagh area. Later, Gilgit police arrested eight protesters, including the chairman of the GB Youth Movement.

GB Youth Movement Chairman Azfar Jamshed said that unless the youth were taken into confidence in the formation of the caretaker provincial cabinet, protests would continue not only in Gilgit but also by GB youth living in other provinces of the country.

Political leaders from the PPP, PML-N and civil society members in Ghanche, Nagar and Shigar districts strongly rejected

the appointments made without representation from their districts. Former GB Assembly member Sultan Ali Khan, Awami Action Committee Ghanche leader Zakir Hussain Kazim and Mohammad Iqbal rejected the caretaker cabinet.

Mr Kazim termed the non-representation of Ghanche district in the caretaker government as fuelling anxiety and frustration among the people of the district. “This fuels a sense of deprivation among the people of the border area, which may have far-reaching negative effects in the future,” he added.

He said appointing three people from a single district while ignoring three other districts raised serious questions about discrimination and the prospects of free and fair elections. He announced protests if the decision was not reviewed.

Similarly, political leaders from Nagar,

including PPP's Muhammad Ali Akhtar, PML-N's Javed Hussain and Sajjad Hussain, strongly reacted to the non-representation of Nagar in the caretaker cabinet. They said that despite Nagar's importance, ignoring its representation was discriminatory and announced resistance until equal representation was ensured.

Political party representatives said that only favoured individuals from certain areas had been appointed to the caretaker cabinet, making the election process suspicious.

Meanwhile, the PML-N, PPP, GB Awami Action Committee and other political parties condemned the arrest of protesters and demanded their immediate release.

Earlier, the appointment of the caretaker set-up had been mired in controversy, as PML-N GB president and former chief minister Hafeezur Rehman had raised concerns

over the inclusion of certain individuals in the cabinet. He said the caretaker cabinet should include representation from all districts and ethnicities of the region, but alleged that some appointees were affiliated with political parties and belonged to specific areas.

Mr Rehman expressed concern that the inclusion of controversial figures could raise questions about the fairness and transparency of the upcoming elections. He said it was previously agreed that the 14-member caretaker cabinet would include representatives from all 10 districts and that no individual who had previously been part of a government or affiliated with a political party would be appointed. He said recommending members from certain constituencies and districts and appointing controversial individuals violated the agreed criteria for a caretaker government.